



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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McGraw Honors Victim of Nigerian Internet Fraud

West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw will honor Wayne County resident Earl Walls on Tuesday, February 6, 2007, in Charleston. Attorney General Darrell McGraw will present Mr. Walls with a Consumer Protection Hero award as one event to commemorate National Consumer Protection Week, February 4 – 10, 2007.

Mr. Walls, a 65-year-old disabled, retired factory worker from Wayne County WV, lost more than money when he was duped into a Nigerian Internet fake check scheme. On September 26, 2006, he was handcuffed, arrested and escorted out of a Wayne County bank. Mr. Walls thought he was handling payments from U.S. customers to an acclaimed artist Jack Russell, owner of an art gallery in England.

The scheme began when Mr. Walls was contacted on September 2 through an unsolicited e-mail. He was offered a 10 percent commission for each check he processed. He believed he was responding to a legitimate job offer to act as a U.S. agent for "Jack Russell."

On September 15, Mr. Walls received his first Federal Express package containing six traveler's checks in \$500 increments. He was instructed to deposit the checks into his bank account and wire cash to Anthony Orekoya, "Jack Russell's" "business associate" in Nigeria. According to Mr. Walls, the transaction went smoothly. The teller asked no questions. He was given the cash, which he wired through Western Union to Nigeria.

Several weeks later Mr. Walls attempted to cash checks totaling \$4,000. The bank informed Mr. Walls that the previous checks were counterfeit. His reputation shattered, he was charged with 12 counts of counterfeiting.

Mr. Walls' neighbor Felicia Adams contacted West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw's office which assisted Mr. Walls in having the charges dismissed. Mr. Wall's bank accounts and monthly income were frozen when he was arrested. After numerous communications and verification that Mr. Walls was a victim of consumer scam and not a counterfeiter, Attorney General Darrell McGraw's office was able to unfreeze his bank account and restore his monthly Social Security payment.

Attorney General Darrell McGraw wants consumers to be aware of Nigerian Internet fake check schemes such as the one to which Mr. Walls fell victim. According to Attorney General McGraw, some of the checks Earl Walls cashed had no signature and they all had fake routing numbers. If the teller in Walls' situation had taken a few moments to examine the checks he was cashing, the teller would have discovered they were counterfeit.

Nigerian Internet fake check schemes that transfer funds by wire also link such victims to other types of scams. These fraudulent activities include lotteries, sweepstakes, and overcharges from online auctions, sales and deception through the internet including employment and dating websites. Most of these scams originate in Africa, East Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Consumers of all ages should take precautions to protect themselves. Senior citizens should take even more care.

If you have any questions or difficulty resolving issues concerning counterfeit checks or schemes, remember that you can always speak with a mediator in the Attorney General Darrell McGraw's Consumer Protection Division by calling 1-800-368-8808.

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